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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 000773

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: MOFAZ DISCUSSES KARNI AND RAFAH CROSSINGS,
DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN AID TO PALESTINIANS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Ambassador on February 22 that while the GOI appreciates Egypt's efforts to combat smuggling at the Philadelphia Corridor, weapons smuggling continues nevertheless and terrorists are getting into Gaza. He said that if Egypt and the Palestinian Authority (PA) do not operate appropriately at Rafah, the GOI would consider making Karni and Erez international border crossings. Mofaz commented that the GOI wants to keep the Karni crossing open, but that he knows attempts to attack the passage will continue, so the GOI is preparing Kerem Shalom as an alternative if it has to close Karni. The Ambassador told Mofaz that the USG considers Karni a lifeline for the Palestinian economy, and asked whether there is a way to reinforce security at the crossing. Regarding contacts with a Hamas-led government, Mofaz said Israel would consider it a terrorist entity if it does not accept the GOI's three stated conditions. He said working-level contacts may be difficult in the future depending on who controls the Palestinian security establishment. The Ambassador emphasized that the USG has a worldwide diplomatic campaign to encourage support for the Quartet principles and to discourage any contacts with Hamas. Mofaz also told the Ambassador that the GOI's policy would be for humanitarian aid to be delivered directly to the Palestinian people through organizations such as USAID, UNRWA, and the Red Cross, but not through Hamas. He said that COGAT Major General Yosef Mishlev had been charged to explain this policy to the heads of aid organizations. End summary.

Karni and Rafah Passages

2. (C) Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and the Ambassador on February 22 discussed issues related to the Karni and Rafah passages in the Gaza Strip. The Ambassador told Mofaz that Karni is a lifeline for the Palestinian economy, and that the transit of goods through the passage can be made safer with the proper technology and support infrastructure. He also informed Mofaz that over the last few weeks, the USG has been working with the Palestinian Authority (PA) to try to obtain a letter from the PA explicitly acknowledging the security protocol of the Rafah crossing. USSC General Dayton told Mofaz that he had attended a meeting with EU/BAM Lt. Gen. Pistolese earlier in the day, and that Pistolese had mentioned four security issues to be resolved under the auspices of the Security Working Group. Dayton explained to Mofaz that Pistolese is concerned about the effectiveness of the Egyptian local commander at Rafah because the GOE official does not have the proper guidance from Cairo. Dayton said that he had scheduled a meeting on March 9 with GOE, GOI, PA, and U.S. security officials to resolve the problems at Rafah, and that he would suggest that Egypt establish a liaison office either in Ashkelon or at Rafah to be in direct contact with Cairo at all times. As Dayton explained, Pistolese wanted Mofaz to know that Israel's security needs are very important to the EU, and that he expects Egypt to "do better." The Ambassador assured Mofaz that the USG is working closely with all parties involved.

3. (C) Mofaz told the Ambassador that he appreciates Egypt's efforts to try to combat smuggling along the Philadelphia Corridor, but stressed that the smuggling continues. He said that EGIS Chief Omar Soliman had asked for a list of "every problem" at their February 14 meeting, and had promised Mofaz that the GOE would take care of the issues the GOI presented to Egypt. Amos Gilad, political director of the Ministry of Defense (MOD), emphasized that it is important to control the Rafah crossing because even "Zarqawi elements are moving in." He claimed that the Zarqawi elements have the direct goal of hurting "U.S. targets." Gilad said that with respect to Rafah, everyone is happy except the GOI. Mofaz added that if the security problems continue at Rafah, and the Palestinians and Egyptians do not operate appropriately, the GOI's next option would be to make Karni and Erez international border crossings because it is difficult for Israel to accept that arms and terrorists are getting into Gaza. The Ambassador asked whether the GOI had passed Egypt a "blacklist" of names that it does not want to be allowed into Gaza. Gilad responded that Egypt had been given a GOI list, but 200

individuals had entered regardless. Soliman claimed not to know anything about this at their recent meeting.

14. (C) Regarding Karni, Mofaz commented that the GOI knew that there was a tunnel being built to attack the passage, and said that Israel was lucky on February 21 that no one was hurt. He asserted, however, that attempts to attack the passage will continue, and that although the GOI wants Karni to remain open, Israel cannot take the risk. He asked that the U.S. pass a clear message to the Palestinians that they must stop terror attacks on the crossing, or the GOI would close Karni and open Kerem Shalom instead. Mofaz mentioned that Israel is currently preparing Kerem Shalom as an alternative because he "believe(s) there are more plans to attack Karni," even though he knows "they will eventually attack Kerem Shalom, too." He said that he would meet with COGAT Major General Yosef Mishlev on February 23 to determine how long Karni should be closed in light of the February 21. He commented that he knows it is a lifeline for the Palestinian people, but that the GOI is responsible for the lives of its people and it cannot take the risk of exposing its soldiers or civilians to damage. The Ambassador asked whether there was a new plan to reinforce security at the crossings, besides scanners. Mofaz replied that, notwithstanding the cabinet declarations of February 19, there has been no change in policy regarding security at Karni and Kerem Shalom.

Hamas-led Government

15. (C) The Ambassador inquired about what the GOI would do when Hamas and Ismail Haniya take over the Palestinian government. Mofaz responded that from Israel's perspective, the government is a terrorist government until it accepts Israel's three stated conditions. Gilad interjected that it was "disturbing" to hear that Fatah elements may want to join a coalition. Mofaz continued that it would be difficult for the GOI to speak to anyone in the PA, and that Israel does not make a distinction between Haniya and PA President Mahmud Abbas because the government is "one authority, one entity." He rhetorically asked who would take responsibility if terrorism continued after the government was established, and added that for the time being, the GOI is waiting to see if Hamas accepts its conditions.

Humanitarian Needs of the Palestinians

16. (C) The Ambassador also asked how Israel would handle the issue of the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. Mofaz replied that humanitarian channels such as USAID, UNRWA, and the Red Cross would continue as long as the aid goes directly to the Palestinian people and not through Hamas. He said that Mishlev would have a meeting with the heads of NGOs to explain the GOI's policy on this matter. He also said that the GOI expects to review this policy every week. The Ambassador told Mofaz that A/S David Welch would be interested in discussing the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians with Israeli officials during his visit this weekend. The Ambassador explained that the PA currently has a budgetary shortfall of about \$65 million, and asked whether the GOI would continue to provide water, electricity, and fuel to the Palestinians. Mofaz replied that Israel would do so, but did not address the issue of payment for fuel supplies. He emphasized that while it would not limit humanitarian support, it would change the way the support is delivered. The Ambassador stressed the need for creativity from Israel on how to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians.

Who Does the GOI Talk To?

17. (C) The Ambassador told Mofaz that he had recently learned that Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert would not move forward on the AMA customs agreement with the Palestinians. Mofaz said that the GOI cannot sign a document with "someone who doesn't recognize us." In response to the Ambassador's question, Gilad replied that the GOI attitude on the customs agreement might change if the Palestinians recognized the AMA security protocol. Dayton asked for clarification on the GOI's policy on meeting with Palestinian officials, and Mofaz explained that on specific issues, such as Rafah, GOI officials would have to get permission from the cabinet before the meeting took place on a case-by-case basis. The Ambassador asked whether security forces in the West Bank would be able to talk to their Palestinian counterparts. Mofaz replied that they could, but in the future that could be more difficult depending on whether Hamas gains control of security at an operational level.

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JONES